

## **Testimony of Tricia Winter in support of HB566**

When Philip was born we lived in Princeton, New Jersey, close to numerous excellent resources for individuals on the autism spectrum. Unaware of his autism and the need we would have for those resources, we moved to Connecticut when he was two. Two and half years and numerous doctors' appointments later, we finally confirmed the diagnosis we had long suspected. Then, despite a two year waiting list, within four months, secured an evaluation and recommendation from Dr. Michael Powers for the intensive Applied Behavioral Analysis therapy, research had shown us was key to Philip's future. Few people in CT were using ABA at that time, and so resources to administer the programs were scarce. We then convinced the Co-Director of the Alpine Learning Center, a premier New Jersey school for children with autism, who fortuitously lived in Stamford, to become our program consultant and we searched local universities for people to train as therapists. Philip thrived on the therapy, and after only 3 months and against all expectations was ready to kindergarten on time.

Throughout his school years we have worked with teachers and support staff and external resources to continue to facilitate his acquisition of academic, social and independent living skills. Philip is now a high school senior and his progress to date has been a heartwarming and surprising journey which numerous people have contributed to. However, despite all of the efforts and the gains, Philip is not able to follow in his sister's footsteps and go off to college, nor is he able to join the workforce without supports and further assistance.

All along, when confronted with issues and challenges, we have been fortunate to be able to find and assemble resources to help Philip continue to make progress. However, a couple of years

ago I started to become very concerned about the transition from school to the workplace, given that Connecticut only provides supports to adults with mental retardation. I became aware of a whole community of adults on the autism spectrum whose quality of life fell far short of what they were capable of, and of what we wanted for our son: they did not live independently, were mostly unemployed and had limited or no social interactions in their communities. I realized how difficult it was going to be for me to find the supports Philip would need to be successful in the workplace and the community: job, social and independent living skills coaching. The lack of funding for services for this population, inevitably leads to a lack of trained providers with experience in how to work successfully with adults with ASD.

Fortunately I became aware of the efforts of Lois Rosenwald, and ASRC to address this issue and I joined the steering committee for the Pilot program. I have been privileged to see first hand the progress made since the funding and launch of the initial pilot and the appointment of Kathy Reddington to lead this effort as Autism Coordinator. The difference the services provided are making in the lives of these adults and their families is remarkable, as are their previously untapped talents and abilities.

Please vote for Bill HB 5666 to continue these crucial services and to make them available immediately to more adults within our state and hopefully ultimately, to our sons and daughters who with these supports can transition from high school into the community as productive, socially active citizens building upon the skills developed as a result of the support invested in them during the school years. It makes no sense to squander that investment and deprive these young adults and our community of their potential.